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ABSTRACT

The study examined the advising attitudes and practices of faculty members identified as developmental advisors at two women's liberal arts colleges. Developmental advising, as distinguished from prescriptive advising, was defined as a relationship based on shared responsibility in which students participate in the academic planning process. Advisors were trained and served in extended freshman orientation and advising programs. Students then completed the Academic Advising Inventory, which identified those advisors using a developmental approach, and 38 of those advisors completed the specially developed Academic Advisor Survey. Activities identified in the frequency distribution of responses suggest that developmental advisors use the academic advising relationship to: (1) involve students in their individual college experiences, including advising; (2) explore with students those factors contributing to student success; and (3) display interest in students' academic and extracurricular progress. Developmental advisors cluster their activities around individual concerns such as out-of-class activities, classroom experiences, and personal values. Tables detail the frequency distribution and factor loadings of survey responses. (27 references) (DB)

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Educational Improvement Through Academic Advising: Advisor Attitudes and Practices That Make a Difference

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Educational Improvement Through Academic Advising:

Advisor Attitudes and Practices That Make a Difference

Theory-based avenues of educational improvement, though described in the literature, often do not find wide application on college campuses. While authors explain concepts and suggest applications, they do not identify individual attitudes and practices. Academic advising is one such area of concern. Although the literature recommends a developmental advising process in which students and advisors share responsibility for academic planning, research indicates that most students do not participate in the advising relationship, but continue to receive short-term answers to questions about scheduling and registration.

In an attempt join theory and practice and contribute to the teaching function of advising, specific advising procedures at two colleges were explored. After participating in organized advising programs, students reported the nature of the advising they received. Faculty advisors in programs rated as developmental by their students then answered questions about specific advising attitudes and practices. Response frequency and factor analysis categorized the results into areas of concern and identified particular activities for each area.

Background

Although Greenwood (1984) describes advising as "one of the most important and influential components of a higher education institution...[having] the capacity to become a primary integrating factor that brings students, faculty, ...and curriculum together into a truly meaningful educational whole" (p. 64) and Astin (1984) identifies advising as a major contributor to student involvement, national higher education study

committees and researchers of student opinion consistently point to advising as an important academic support service in need of attention (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; National Institute of Education, 1984).

Improved advising services have been discussed for some time. In an effort to define the teaching function of advising, Crookston (1972) identified (a) the prescriptive, or traditional approach, in which students receive answers to specific questions and are closely supervised by advisors; and (b) developmental advising, a relationship based on shared responsibility in which students participate in the academic planning process. Crookston views the "university as an intellectual learning center within which individuals and social systems interact in and out of the classroom and utilize developmental tasks within and without the university for personal growth" (p. 16). In this environment the advising relationship becomes a negotiated agreement between students and teachers. Advisors focus on students' potential to become self-directed. In contrast, prescriptive advising is a limiting, supervisory relationship in which advisors take the initiative to fulfill requirements.

Grites (1979), Winston, Miller, and Ender (1984), and Gardner (1986) affirm Crookston's view; advising, like teaching, should provide for new directions of thought and have the capacity to change behavior. College students not only look for answers to questions concerning course loads and registration, they also seek academic mentors to help them acquire the skills they need to plan their academic futures. Students identify intellectual issues as the most significant they face and seem to prefer advising relationships centered around academic matters and not personal concerns

(Fielstein, 1987, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Sagaria, Higginson, & White, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). The advising relationship offers a logical setting to explore individual academic questions. When structured developmentally, advising can become "the vehicle most likely to succeed" (Gordon, 1988, p. 107) in providing a personalized education and encouraging students to view college as a positive experience.

While developmental advising is espoused in the literature, in student personnel and higher education graduate programs (Goetz & White, 1986; Grites, 1989), and in planning and policy arenas (Grites, 1989), the concept is not widely implemented on college campuses. Surveys indicate that students are dissatisfied with advising, which they describe as a low-status, prescriptive function addressing their informational needs only (Boyer, 1987; Habley, 1988; McLaughlin & Starr, 1982; Winston & Sandor, 1984c). Astin, Korn, and Green (1987) report that after two years 52% percent of the respondents in the American Council on Education-University of California at Los Angeles Cooperative Institutional Research Program (ACE-CIRP) were least satisfied with academic advising as one of the personal services offered by colleges and universities. The authors express particular concern for the low rating because they identify advising as the principal tool for involving students in the curriculum.

In contrast, Frost (1989b, in press) investigated academic advising programs at two liberal arts women's colleges and found that both programs received developmental ratings from students. At one college a significant portion of the explained variance in pre- and posttest scores on two of the five scales of the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal was due to developmental advising. The student response rate in this study was 73% (n = 206). Only 9% of those completing the inventory (n = 18) reported that they

were prescriptively advised. While students at the two colleges differed significantly on high school grade point average ($t(200) = -7.52$, $p < .001$), SAT scores ($t(197) = 12.703$, $p < .001$), and parents' combined income ($t(191) = 4.14$, $p < .001$), none of the precollege variables were significantly related to developmental advising score. (This study is subsequently referred to as the Watson-Glaser study.)

Purpose of the Study

This research was designed to investigate the advising attitudes and practices of faculty members identified as developmental advisors by students participating in the Watson-Glaser study. The advisors were questioned to determine the content and importance of specific advising activities. Analysis revealed three classifications of activities and specific advising procedures for each classification.

Method

Participants and Data Collection

Participants were faculty members (n = 48) who served as freshman advisors and received developmental ratings from students in the Watson-Glaser study. During the Watson-Glaser study, both groups of advisors served in extended orientation and advising programs (15 weeks at College 1; 20 weeks at College 2) that required freshman participation. All advisors received training during pre-term workshops but developmental advising techniques were not specifically discussed with either group. Advising at both colleges takes place in group and individual settings. At the end of the respective advising periods students completed the Academic Advising Inventory (Winston and Sandor, 1984a), an instrument designed to "evaluate advising from a theoretically grounded perspective that would allow comparison across institutions" (Winston & Sandor, 1984b, p.6). In describing their advising

experiences, students chose between prescriptive and developmental orientations of the advising relationship. Prescriptive scores on the advising inventory range from 14 to 56; developmental scores range from 57-112. In the Watson-Glaser study, the advising inventory mean score at College 1 = 70.92 (s.d. = 14.48); College 2 mean score = 79.02 (s.d. = 14.32) (Frost, 1989b).

During the academic year following the Watson-Glaser study advisors completed a survey designed by the researcher to investigate the content and importance of advising tasks that resulted in developmental ratings from students in the Watson-Glaser study. Of the 48 advisors eligible to participate, 38 returned useable responses for a response rate of 79%.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

The researcher developed the Academic Advisor Survey (Frost, 1989a) for this study. The instrument is composed of two scales, the content scale and the importance scale, and can be completed in 15 minutes. To assess specific attitudes and practices of developmental advisors, the 12 items in the content scale parallel those of the Academic Advising Inventory (Winston and Sandor, 1984a). For example, students completing the advising inventory rate the extent to which advisors help students learn about courses and programs for themselves (a developmental response), or tell students about courses and programs (a prescriptive response). Since student respondents rated the participating advisors as developmental, it was assumed that developmental responses described the advisor population. To learn which attitudes and practices resulted in students reporting that advisors helped them learn about programs and courses (as opposed to advisors telling students about programs and courses), the advisor survey includes the following question:

To help your advisees learn about college courses and programs you
____ 1. Direct them to the college bulletin.
____ 2. Suggest that they talk with the proper department chair.
____ 3. Suggest that they talk with the course instructor.
____ 4. Suggest that they talk with other student who have taken the course.
____ 5. Describe course and program content to them yourself.

Possible responses are never, rarely, occasionally, often, and always.

The importance scale is a list of 30 prescriptive and developmental advising activities that are described in the advising inventory. Activities include discussing college policies, planning a schedule for the next term, identifying campus offices that assist students, and talking about or setting personal goals. Advisors indicate on a five-point Likert scale the importance of the activity. Responses range from very important to not important.

Advising administrators, faculty advisors, and researchers critiqued the instrument before a final form was adopted. Their comments concerning clarity and format were incorporated into the final form of the instrument.

A frequency distribution reflects the responses to the content scale of the advisor survey. For reporting purposes, the researcher collapsed the "never" and "rarely" and the "often" and "always" categories. Factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to explore underlying constructs of the importance scale. Three factors having eigenvalues greater than 3.0 were retained. Items with loadings larger than .4, rotated eigenvalues, percent variance explained, and cumulative variance explained are reported.

Results

The content scale frequency distribution identified the activities always, often, occasionally, rarely, or never used by participating faculty members in their roles as developmental advisors. "Always" and "often" responses suggest that developmental advisors (a) use the advising

relationship to explore concepts related to student success (e.g., 84% of those completing the survey often or always allow students to participate in decision making by discussing schedule planning considerations with students, 70% talk to students specifically about study habits, and 70% help students develop specific time management plans); (b) encourage students to use varied campus resources to get the information they need to make decisions (e.g., 73% suggest that students talk with department chairs about career alternatives, 89% suggest that students talk with instructors about courses in a perspective major, and 50% refer students who need to improve their study habits to academic support services); (c) involve students in the mechanics of advising (e.g., 76% have students plan several schedules and then help them select one, and 55% discuss with students the responsibilities of the advisor and the student); and (d) display interest in students' academic progress and outside activities (e.g., 61% have general discussions about outside activities, and 65% indicate to students the value of participating in outside activities).

A look at advising activities never or rarely chosen by developmental advisors can also be instructive. Eighty-six percent of the advisors questioned never or rarely plan schedules for students, 100% never or rarely use an advising contract, and 49% never or rarely suggest particular outside activities for students. See Table 1 for the frequency distribution.

Through factor analysis the underlying constructs of the importance scale as identified by the advisors completing the instrument were explored. Three components were identified. Component 1, with an eigenvalue of 6.30, seems to reflect activities that concern personal attitudes and experiences related to college. Component 2, with an eigenvalue of 5.80, seems to reflect activities that concern group programs, policies, and opportunities. The one exception is the loading of "Evaluating academic progress" on Component 2.

Component 3, with an eigenvalue of 3.78, seems to reflect maintenance, or prescriptive, advising activities. The three factors account for 52.92% percent of the standardized variance.

The first component has positive loadings larger than .4 for 13 of the 30 items. Items with the largest loadings are discussing out-of-class activities (.810), extracurricular activities (.794), experiences in different classes (.760), and personal values (.722). The second component has loadings larger that .4 for 12 of the 30 items. Items with the largest loadings are discussing internship opportunities (.825), career alternatives (.755), and special academic programs (.750). The four items composing the third component have loadings larger than .7. These items are selecting courses (.821), dropping and adding courses (.806), signing registration forms (.778), and schedule planning (.718). Results of the factor analysis are reported in Table 2.

Discussion

Those activities identified in the frequency distribution of the content scale suggest that developmental advisors use the academic advising relationship to (a) involve students in their individual college experiences, including advising, (b) explore with students those factors contributing to student success, and (c) display interest in students' academic and extracurricular progress. They rarely make decisions for students, preferring instead to engage students in the decision-making process. Factor analysis of the importance scale suggests that developmental advisors cluster their activities around individual concerns such as out-of-class activities, classroom experiences, and personal values; specific opportunities such as internships, career alternatives, and special academic programs; and routine maintenance duties.

These advisor preferences support Fielstein's (1987, 1989) findings regarding students' preferences in the advising relationship. Fielstein found that students seem to desire a personal relationship with advisors, but prefer the relationship to be organized around academic matters and not personal concerns. These results suggest that developmental advisors want to get to know students personally and display an interest in their total college experiences. They encourage students to ask open-ended questions, use campus resources to find answers, and plan schedules and courses around the outcomes of their explorations.

Since advising is one out-of-class academic experience that all students share and since most advising is done by faculty members (Habley and Crockett, 1988), specific attitudes and practices of successful advisors are important. Although a limited number of advisors from two private, single-sex institutions were eligible to participate in the study, the findings are generalizable to any institution that structures advising to allow students and faculty members to participate in an advising partnership. The practices identified can be adopted without major revisions in existing programs. Instead, low- or no-cost procedures and the important accompanying attitudes provide a framework around which committed advisors can foster student participation in academic advising and in the larger college environment.

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Table 1. Frequency distribution derived from responses to items concerning the content of academic advising activities.
(n = 37)

Advising Activities	Never or Rarely	Occasionally	Often or Always
To familiarize students with college programs advisors			
Direct them to the college bulletin.	8	4	25
Suggest that they talk with the proper department chair.	5	14	18
Suggest that they talk with the course instructor.	2	12	23
Suggest that they talk with other students who have taken the course.	11	14	11
Describe course and program content to them yourself.	6	14	16
To allow students to make decisions regarding scheduling advisors			
Plan several schedules and let the student choose.	31	3	2
Have the student plan one schedule and discuss it with you.	8	10	19
Have the student plan several schedules and select one with your help.	13	6	28
Allow the student to plan the schedule for which you sign the proper forms.	14	14	14
Talk with student about what needs to be considered in schedule planning.	1	5	31
To engage students in discussion about vocational opportunities advisors			
Suggest careers for certain majors.	11	15	11
Suggest that students talk with department chairs concerning majors.	3	7	27
Suggest that students talk with instructors concerning majors.	7	6	24
Suggest that students talk with the person or office on campus responsible for career counseling.	7	5	25
Discuss with students developing a plan for decision-making activities.	18	4	15
To indicate interest in students' outside activities advisors			
Ask specific questions about these activities.	8	9	20
Engage in casual conversation about these activities.	2	11	24
Participate with students in outside activities.	14	13	10
Encourage students to become involved in outside activities.	4	9	24
Indicate to students that you see the potential value in participating in outside activities.	4	9	24
To determine who has responsibility for advising activities advisors			
Discuss specifically the responsibilities of the advisor and the student.	11	10	15
Discuss generally the responsibilities of the advisor and the student.	4	8	25
Indicate the responsibilities of each by action rather than discussion.	7	13	17
Use an advising contract with specific duties and responsibilities spelled out.	37		
To help students with decisions advisors			
Invite them to come to you specifically to discuss problems.	1	3	32
Use the advising relationship to model problem-solving skills.	15	8	14
Discuss general problem-solving skills with students.	13	22	2
Give students materials that review good decision-making skills.	32	3	2
Be explicit about problem-solving steps that you utilize in the advising relationship.	19	8	9

Table 1 (continued)

Advising Activities	Never or Rarely	Occasionally	Often or Always
To help students learn about time management advisors			
Talk to students specifically about time management.	2	9	25
Ask students about their time management skills in casual conversation.	5	16	15
Suggest sources for students to learn about time management.	16	7	13
Help student develop a specific time management plan.	16	12	8
To help students develop effective study habits advisors			
Talk to students specifically about study habits.	4	7	26
Ask students about their study skills in casual conversation.	5	13	19
Suggest sources for students to learn about study skills.	17	9	11
Refer students to the person or office on campus responsibile for academic support services.	5	13	18
To help students consider their choice of major advisors			
Suggest that the student talk with faculty members in various departments that interest her.	1	3	33
Suggest that the student seek help in the career planning office.	6	15	16
Suggest that the student talk with other students in the departments that interest her.	5	9	23
Explore various choices with the student yourself.	6	6	25
To engage students in discussion about other-than-academic interests advisors			
Have specific discussions about outside activities.	13	11	13
Have general discussions about outside activities.	3	11	22
Participate with your advisees in outside activities.	16	13	8
Suggest particular activities that the student might want to pursue.	18	15	4
To keep students informed of their academic progress advisors			
Make specific appointments with students to review their progress.	9	10	18
Review their progress in casual meetings.	6	11	19
Review their progress when you meet to discuss the next term's schedule.	2	7	27
Communicate the student's academic progress in writing.	11	9	16
Suggest that the student develop a long-range academic plan for herself.			
To assist students in identifying realistic academic goals advisors			
Ask them specifically about their past academic performance.	4	12	21
Get this information from their high school transcripts.	7	3	27
Get this information from their entering test scores (SAT or ACT).	6	8	23
Get this information from their institutional placement scores.	11	4	22

Table 2. Varimax factor loadings derived from responses to items concerning the importance of academic advising activities. (N = 38)

Advising Activities	Factors: Individual Concerns	Specific opportunities	Maintenance Activities
Talking about out-of-class activities	.810	.053	.054
Discussing extra-curricular activities	.794	.074	.131
Discussing experiences in different classes	.760	.035	.098
Discussing personal values	.722	.378	-.121
Discussing time management	.709	.305	-.071
Getting to know each other	.678	.236	-.044
Discussing course content	.645	.456	.174
Talking about or setting personal goals	.600	.493	-.353
Discussing personal concerns	.534	.176	-.222
Discussing degree of major requirements	.489	-.091	.317
Discussing social or political issues	.488	.347	-.424
Discussing majors	.466	.310	.147
Discussing study skills	.454	.082	-.250
Discussing internship opportunities	.140	.825	.072
Discussing career alternatives	.328	.755	-.090
Discussing special academic programs	.132	.750	.038

Only factor loadings $\geq$ .40 are shown

Advising Activities	Factors: Individual Concerns	Specific Opportunities	Maintenance Activities
Discussing financial aid	.110	.656	-.044
Discussing probation or dismissal policies	.436	.609	.256
Evaluating academic progress	.208	.598	.223
Discussing advanced placement	-.121	.591	.478
Discussing college policies	.078	.589	-.012
Discussing the purpose of a college education	.284	.565	-.032
Discussing job opportunities	.499	.514	.183
Discussing transfer credit and policies	.083	.476	.421
Declaring or changing major	.439	.446	.365
Selecting courses for the next term	.160	.127	.821
Dropping/adding courses	-.094	.024	.806
Signing registration forms	.070	-.141	.778
Planning a schedule for the next term	.063	.142	.718
Eigenvalues(rotated)	6.30	5.80	3.78
% Variance explained	20.99	19.33	12.60
% Cumulative variance explained	20.99	40.33	52.92